FROM CATTLE HERDING TO SEDENTARY AGRICULTURE: THE ROLE OF HAMER WOMEN IN THE TRANSITION

AUTHOR(S):

Samuel, Tefera

CITATION:

Samuel, Tefera. FROM CATTLE HERDING TO SEDENTARY AGRICULTURE: THE ROLE OF HAMER WOMEN IN THE TRANSITION. African study monographs. Supplementary issue 2013, 46: 121-133

ISSUE DATE:

2013-03

URL:

https://doi.org/10.14989/173538

FROM CATTLE HERDING TO SEDENTARY AGRICULTURE: THE ROLE OF HAMER WOMEN IN THE TRANSITION

Samuel Tefera
Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University

ABSTRACT The Hamer people make up a pastoral and agro-pastoral society that depends predominantly on livestock for its livelihood. Herding livestock involves seasonal migration to find grazing pastures, salt, and water. In the relatively fertile areas of the district, however, the Hamer practice farming and plow their fields with oxen. Due to insufficient rain in the lowlands, sustaining agricultural activities has been problematic despite the gradual increase in agrarian activities. Yet, the pastoral way of life is still unquestionably dominant. Hamer women cultivate sorghum, which has been their staple food for centuries. Migrating to areas with better grazing pastures inhabited by agro-pastoral groups has enhanced trade interactions and furthered the Hamer's growing interest and skills in farming. Such economic interdependence—trade and the essential integration of farming with the pastoral system could have led to the exchange of goods and the change to a more sedentary lifestyle.

Key Words: Hamer; Farming; Women; Transition.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Classification of Ethiopian agriculturalists as seed farmers, ensete and tuber bearing plant farmers, or pastoralists is based partly on climatic and ethnic factors, but mainly based on livestock husbandry and the need to move from one place to another to find new grazing pastures (Westphal, 1975). According to Westphal, past invasions and migrations have led some farmers into areas where rainfall is adequate for arable farming, but many farmers continue to focus primarily on raising livestock, and areas even suitable for intensive farming do not produce crops.

Pastoralism among the Hamer people involves raising cattle, sheep, and goats, and most recently, camels for their livelihood. Seasonal migration in search of grass and water is required. However, in Buska, Shanko, and the Beshada highlands, locations relatively fertile in the Hamer District, the soil retains moisture after it rains. In such places the Hamer plow with oxen. A household survey by the district PDO (2005) identified 35% of the Hamer as agro-pastoral, and the remaining 65% as predominantly pastoral. However, Strecker (1976: 47) argues that the Hamer should not be labeled solely as pastoralists or agriculturalists since their culture is a combination of both. Strecker reports that the Hamer can be classified as 60% agriculturalist and 40% pastoralist. According to him, unlike the PDO (2005) report the percentage of the pastoral Hamer population in the district is less than the agro pastoral Hamer in proportion. Whether the transition to an agricultural livelihood is a response to the changing climate or an influence from the state requiring the Hamer to settle is debatable. The Hamer continue to

produce sorghum, although a pastoral lifestyle is unquestionably predominant. Grazing movements to areas inhabited by agrarian and agro-pastoral societies, as well as trade interactions, have contributed considerably to the Hamer's growing interest and skill in farming. In a similar case the majority of the Afar people mainly relied on pastoralism for subsistence except for the Afar of the Ausa region whose livelihood depended on agriculture, local and external trade on top of pastoralism (Getachew, 2001: 35–36). Getachew (2001: 98–100) further noted changes in new type of land use and introduction of new farming techniques despite failures in settlement schemes that aimed to change the pastoral Afar into self-sufficient sedentary farmer.

Establishment and development of reciprocal and interdependent relations by pastoralists with neighboring sedentary communities benefit the pastoral production system (Nori et al., 2008: 8). Such interdependence must have contributed to an increase in the exchange of goods, sharing of lifestyles, and integration of farm products into the pastoral system. Agro-ecologies link pastoral and agricultural systems; and considerable economic importance is attached to mobility beyond its implication on resource management strategy. Pastoral movement associated with the search for rangeland resources creates opportunities for constructing trade relationships and forming friendships and power relationships. Unfortunately, a reduced resource base and recurrent drought are just some of the factors that threaten the livestock base in the Hamer area. Drought has affected pastoral livelihoods, mobility patterns, and relationships with their neighbors. On the other hand, it induces various survival strategies to the Hamer livelihood system. As we see later in this paper, an example can be the introduction of plant varieties, particularly sorghum, from neighboring ethnic groups which further promotes domestication and adoption of sedentary life.

This paper describes the growing, though gradual, trend of the Hamer people to participate in agricultural activities. It focuses on the leading role of women in transforming farming activities.

STUDY AREA AND METHODS

The Hamer people live in the Hamer District of the South Omo Zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR). According to the Ethiopian Central Statistical Agency's report 2008, the estimated population of the Hamer people is 59,160. Farming, herding livestock, and beekeeping are basic livelihoods associated with the area's economy.

Hamer settlements are located in the highland and lowland areas in the district, often as clusters of close relatives in villages. In a Hamer household, both nuclear and extended families live together. They are polygamous, patriarchal, and patrilocal. A particular Hamer household unit consists of a male head of family (*donza*); his wife or wives; his mother; nuclear and extended family members; future wife of his son; cattle, goat, and sheep. Inside a fenced compound exist separate houses for each of his wives, his mother and kraal. According to the host mother BB of the author, the Hamer use the term *delen kelonti* to refer to the entire unit described

above. *Dele* literally means "enclosure" and *kela* translates to "one," giving the meaning, "all under one enclosure." The present study reflects the ethnographic research conducted while staying with a Hamer family from 2010 to 2012.

LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES AND INCOME

The survey of eight Hamer households regarding livelihood activities and sources (Table 1) revealed that all except two households had enclosures for grazing and farming. BS and MK, from the highland area, showed no activity for sales of local drinks, wood, or grass. Their activities focused more on farming, managing enclosures for grazing, beekeeping, and other forms of engagement to earn money. The rest of the households, from the lowlands, earned income from selling local drinks, wood, and grass. Only one household raised poultry for selling eggs in the Turmi market. It can be inferred from Table 1 that households in both the highlands and lowlands engaged primarily in herding and beekeeping, followed by farming and operating the wedge. Women are typically responsible for selling wood, grass, and local drinks, and assisting with the management of enclosures for grazing.

The arid nature of the Hamer plains and lack of sufficient rainfall to sustain agricultural activities present challenges with some opportunities for the people who focus on livestock husbandry and beekeeping. According to one elder from W village in the district, the Hamer people did not give much attention to farming when he was a child. Women, however, were expert sorghum planters.(1) He added that currently the average size of a farm field owned by one person is five times the size of one when he was a child.(2) We can conclude that the Hamer people are becoming increasingly interested in farming, as shown by generous allocations of labor to farming activities, large farm plot sizes, and new techniques including use of oxen for plowing. According to a district pastoral development officer, the Nyangatom people had not yet used oxen to till their land, but Hamer farmers transitioned from broadcast sowing (scattering seed over the soil surface) to tilling the land with oxen at the beginning of the Socialist rule (1974–1991).

Table 1. Livelihood activities and income sources for eight Hamer households in 2011

head of a household	Source of livelihood and income generation							
	Grazing enclosure	Livestock herding	Farming	Beekeeping	Wood and grass	Poultry	Local drinks	Wedge labor
BS	+	+	+	+	–	+	–	+
MK	+	+	+	+	–	–	–	+
GB	–	+	–	+	–	–	–	–
OK	+	+	+	+	+	–	–	+
Ka	+	+	+	+	+	–	–	+
WA	–	+	–	+	–	–	–	–
AA	+	+	+	+	+	+	–	+
SK	+	+	+	+	+	+	–	+

Table 2. Sorghum varieties in Hamer

Vernacular name	Characteristics	Remarks
Delgo	Resistant to drought and strong sunlight Sour (seeds before maturity) Important as a food source, particularly for children, during dry seasons, Small amount of food made from *delgo* can keep the stomach full	Seeds mixed with butter, coffee beans, and *Bereza* branches/leaves for social ritual prior to new plowing season (sown with blessings for a productive harvest)
Maale	Wheat-colored, drought resistant Digestible (even young seeds can be fried and eaten)	
Mursu	Light black in color (*Shemeji, Fezaza tikur*) Powdery following grinding Resistant to drought and strong sunlight Commonly used to brew alcohol (Ferso) for local social events like cattle-leaping	
Ekumba	White in color Difficult to grind because of strong seeds Easily in-digestible (makes good food source during drought seasons as it remains in the stomach)	Women not fond of it as it is difficult to grind
Simbele gabo	White with black spots, drought resistant Used for brewing local alcohol (*Ferso*)	
Ar	White in color Not resistant to strong sun or drought Nutritional (good food source)	Sorghum variety imported from Dassenetch
Batada	White in color Not drought resistant Nutritional (good food source)	Sorghum variety imported from Kara

Fig. 1. GA's farm Zeleketa area of the Hamer district.

Admasu et al. (2010) reported that 8% of the Hamer sampled in their research produced crops for commercial purposes beyond home consumption.

Farming is not an activity of the impoverished pastoralist drop-outs who have incurred asset shocks, such as loss of livestock to drought or disease. Rather, it has traditionally been women led activity that lasted for centuries as a survival strategy. For example, the Hamer women enjoy a special ritual associated with planting *delgo*, a sorghum variety (Table 2). The importance of these rituals is reflected by participation from the *Gudli*[3] of the village.

CULTIVATING CROPS: TRANSFORMING TO A FARMING COMMUNITY

The Hamer mainly cultivate sorghum (Fig. 1). Tilling land to plant sorghum, maize, and other crops has commonly been regarded as women's work, but men who live in the lowlands are beginning to become engaged in this activity. According to an old man in W village, one goat used to be exchanged for one *Dore* (pile of maize or sorghum). Desta (1999: 11) likewise indicated that exchanging livestock and related products for grains and other goods and services has been a practice of lowland pastoral groups. Such an exchange of commodities also exists in many areas in the country.

Varieties of sorghum originated from Hamer and elsewhere and other agricultural products are grown in the subsistence rain-fed farming system (Table 2). The Hamer sorghum varieties exhibit resistance to drought and water stress. Except maize, all the crops appearing in Table 3 are common sources of food during dry seasons, when milk is not readily available. According to BB, Hamer woman engaged in farming activities prefer sorghum to maize because it resists drought and grows with little rain. They sow maize together with sorghum because maize that is sown alone will die out in a sunny and dry environment. Sorghum, however, is annual crop known for its long growing season (four months).

One can assume that movements to herd camps for grazing are factors for the increase in farming activities. We can also argue that an increase in the number of people pursuing an agricultural livelihood is a source of conflict with neighboring pastoral communities; it may serve as the motivation for people to enclose their land. This trend might affect the use of commonly pooled resources, pastoral use rights, and land ownership in the region. Galaty (1994: 187–194) characterized livestock keepers in Africa's vast and dry lands as either animal husbandry specialists or herders engaged in rain-fed cultivation (Fig. 2).

Table 3. Dry season food sources

Names of Crops	Characteristics
Maize	Sown in wet fields; unable to resist dry periods
Sunflower, *Peche*	Green in appearance; grown in the Benna area
Zaqa	Smaller in size than *peche*; drought resistant; sweet
Ged	Sweet and drought resistant

Fig. 2. Hamer man tilling land.

Case 1: Individual experiences in villages around Turmi

KA is the brother-in-law of BB; the two jointly manage KA's farm enclosure. It has been more than five years since they started cultivating crops. Part of the farm enclosure is used to grow grass, which is especially abundant during the rainy season. KA and BB collect the grass and use it to cover the roof tops of their houses, often leaving some in the field for free grazing by milk cows, oxen, and small ruminants. The livestock composition in the farm enclosure varies with changes in the amount of grass cover. When the grass cover gets smaller, KA and BB restrict access to only oxen, and cows are taken to bushes away from the farm and village. KA learned farming skills, including how to plow with oxen, from his older brother (AA), a man in his 60s. AA had apparently acquired his skills from the Benna people. KA has been farming since the Socialist regime assumed power in Ethiopia in 1974. When grasses are plentiful, he fattens the oxen and exchanges them for cows or heifers. KA explained that his grandparents started enclosing their land to grow sorghum. Apart from fattening and securing feed for his herd, the farm enclosure has allowed KA to grow and sell grass. In addition, it is a source of shade and feed for weak and sick livestock, small goats, and sheep.

Case 2: Grazing space in farm enclosure near the Marley River, Turmi

This farm enclosure is managed by BB and KA. BB's share of land has two purposes. The area used for farming is 1.6 ha large and 0.75 ha of the land is for growing grass. KA manages approximately 1.12 ha. The entire enclosure measures 3.47 ha.[4]

What is Inside Their Farm Enclosure, *hamy*?

According to the present author's observation in August 2011, grass, including *aren* used for covering roofs, grew only on about 0.023% of the farmland. The majority of the farm enclosure was occupied by bushes and sparsely grown trees. Spiny shrubs fenced in a mango tree. The present author noticed leftover sorghum stalks from the previous farming season and six goats belonging to a woman from W village inside the enclosure. He also saw a beehive hanging from a tree that apparently belonged to someone else. The enclosure is close to two water wells constructed near the Marley river and is situated on the left side of the Dimeka-Turmi road, about 3.5 km from the village. It is adjacent to the old course of the river (about 15 m from the seven-year-old "new" course). The old course has been filled with sand and retains overflow water in case of major flooding, which last occurred in 2008. The proximity of the farm to the river allows BB and KA to take advantage of sediment remaining on the farm after flooding. Enclosures along the river are typical in Hamer. The present author learned that most of the farmers in the villages experienced a good harvest the year before the formation of the new course. Some other people in the village estimated that they collected 15 quintals of sorghum while BB and KA collected 9 quintals each.

Working Together on the Farm

BB and KA started their partnership a year after BB enclosed the land. The farm enclosure has one gate. Trees growing inside the farm are used as demarcations of their individual plots and are referred to as *maale*. There is a wooden shelter in the farm enclosure where BB and WK, who is KA's wife, alternatively spend nights during pre-harvest seasons. Near the shelter, different cooking and eating utensils are stored. Women prepare meals there during the farming seasons.

Agriculture is not the only option for supplementing the Hamer's pastoral system; subsistence and commercial alternatives also exist (e.g., beekeeping and use of forestry products). The beginning of the rainy season affects the timing of farming activities and the movement between farms and grazing areas. Agro-ecological variations create timing differences for engagement and harvesting in the lowland and highland areas. These changes also affect movement of livestock and social rituals.

SEASONS AND MOBILITY

Mobility between grazing areas within and beyond the Hamer territory during dry and rainy seasons is not necessarily driven by resource scarcity or conservation. A trend analysis revealed that the Hamer targeted better quality pasture, water access, and availability of minerals (i.e., salty pasture) to effectively utilize range resources and maximize livestock production. However, conservation has become a growing concern among government agencies and environmentalists, since the

Hamer's increasing livestock holdings and agricultural activities have led to increased demand for land. Apart from their economic benefits, livestock are a sign of prestige as well as source of food for pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. Seasons mark periods of festivity, conflict, sowing, harvest, reproduction, as well as livestock and human mobility. Sorghum, maize, sunflower seeds, pumpkin (*bote*), and wheat are typically grown in the area if rain is not a constraint.

GENDER DIVISION OF LABOR

Because men are the leaders and decision makers in pastoralist societies, it is sometimes mistakenly assumed that women play no significant socioeconomic roles. In fact, government agencies and development projects tended to neglect them; subsequently, many developmental interventions failed in pastoral areas (IIRR, 2004: 109). Culturally, girls and women are among the most vulnerable groups within pastoral societies. According to the present observation, child labor was found to block children's participation in alternative basic education centers in a village called W in the year 2010. Girls of school age were absorbed with daily activities mainly in keeping birds away from farms, cooking meals in the farms and cultivating the farm. They also carried out other chores such as collecting firewood, fetching water, cleaning and taking care of siblings and small ruminants. Boys on the other hand were given assignments such as taking care of the cattle, goat and sheep herd around the village and in camp herds that are located away from the village. In the alternative basic education center that provides education service at three levels, school dropouts were common particularly among boys as they were often sent to herd camps very far from the village. Girls are more fortunate in attending classes even after getting married as long as the educational centers exist in the husbands' villages. However, boys are less privileged in attending these classes. They have little chance of coming back to the village as their responsibilities of moving with the livestock in herd camps grow along with their social roles up on marriage.

Roles are assigned based on gender of family members (Table 4). Workload varies from season to season. During dry seasons and drought periods, men

Table 4. Activity profile of gender-based labor divisions

Gender roles	Characteristics	Remarks
Productive	Constructing houses	Constructing livestock kraal
	Fetching water, collecting firewood	Taking cattle to village camps
	Planting sorghuma and maize	Preparing beehives and harvesting honey
	Making wares from goat hides	
Reproductive	Giving birth and taking care of children and the elderly	Assisting with birthing of cattle and goats
		Cleaning livestock enclosures
	Cooking food for the family	Milking cows and sheep
Community	Working as a group on social events	Attending social and political affairs
	Participating in events like peace meetings	Protecting the Hamer people

move with cattle in search of pasture and possibly enter into conflicts with other pastoralist groups. Women, apart from their daily household routines, participate actively in farming activities. Since mobility is an integral part of the Hamer livelihood, women assume the lion's share of activities associated with the production of sorghum and maize, as well as other crops. Recently, Hamer from the lowlands initiated agro-forestry activities around water points. The author observed such activities near the Marley river in the Angude area. The practice of shifting cultivation is associated with farming mobility (Appendix 1). Festivities take place in the months following harvest, including honoring the dead, weddings, and cattle-leaping.

The information on seasons and their characteristics was developed on the basis of discussions with elders and knowledgeable informants. Months have 30 days each in the Hamer calendar. According to an elder the author met in Turmi town, the Hamer use the expression *edi kela kayisa tebi* to count days. The literal meaning is that all the fingers and toes of a person plus an extra ten (either toes or fingers). The author compared the calendar he developed (see Appendix 1) with those of two other individuals. One of them understood the Hamer year to encompass 12 months, while the other suggested 13 months. When the months in the Hamer calendar were compared to that of the standard calendar of the country, some discrepancies were revealed.(5) Even if further discussions need to be conducted to reach consensus, for now, the similarities outweigh the differences among the findings.

CONCLUSION

Farm enclosures provide space for cultivation of crops, growing grasses, production of honey, and retention of livestock. The Hamer in the highlands showed greater diversification of crop production and more options for income generation than the lowlanders. Due to lack of rains between 2010 and 2011, the Hamer people relied primarily on food aid through the safety net program. Moreover, lack of rain hindered them from ceremonially remembering the dead and organizing cattle-leaping festivities.

Although rainfall has generally decreased over the past decade, group and private farm enclosures have become more common. The Hamer are adopting better farming techniques to increase production. Even in the lowlands, many have started to plow using oxen. Galvin (2009: 193) states, "As pastoralists become sedentary, cultivate, and diversify their livelihoods, the move to increasing control over land becomes understandable."(6) It can be said that the Hamer are experiencing an agricultural transition. The traditional shifting cultivation practiced for centuries with simple broadcasting of seeds of sorghum and maize is now supported by oxen-plowed agriculture. When the rains are plentiful, the harvests are abundant and trade is profitable. Subsequently, the Hamer strengthen their economic alliances through the formation of friendly partnerships with neighbors. Hamer women initiate farming activities and acquire knowledge about each of the varieties in their seed banks. They further characterize varieties according to their function, use, symbolism in ritual services, labor requirements, and taste.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS The author would like to acknowledge Hamer women and men in the Turmi, Denbayite, and Dimeka areas for sharing the information discussed in this paper. The paper is the result of the discussion on farming and seasons.

NOTES

(1) Roughly, his estimate of the size of the farm in his childhood is below a hectare.
(2) AA learned how to plow with oxen while in Benna with his herd (in search of pasture). He also transferred the skill to his brother (Ka).
(3) *Gudli* is a highly respected personality whose community service grants him the honor to make prayers to God (*Barjo*) for rain during seasons of drought. He also prays for bees to enter their hives and fulfills other social roles.
(4) The numbers are estimates of the areal sizes of enclosures based on the author's measurements from 2011.
(5) However, the Amharic and English names of the months corresponding to the Hamer names do not necessarily signify similarity.
(6) Galvin listed sedentary farming (not migratory), land tenure, and climate change as changes affecting grassland and pastoral societies (2009: 187).

REFERENCES

Admasu, T., Abule, E. & Tessema, Z. 2010. Livestock-rangeland management practices and community perceptions towards rangeland degradation in South Omo Zone of southern Ethiopia. *Livestock Research for Rural Development*, Vol. 22, Article #5. Online. http://www.lrrd.org/lrrd22/1/tere22005.htm (Accessed Febuary 14, 2012).

Central Statistical Agency 2008. *Summary and Statistical Report of the 2007 Population and Housing Census. Population Size by Age and Sex*. Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.

Desta, S. 1999. *Diversification of Livestock Assets for Risk Management in the Borana Pastoral System of Southern Ethiopia*. Ph.D dissertation. Utah State University.

Galaty, J.G. 1994. Rangeland tenure and pastoralism in Africa. In (E. Fratkin, K.A. Galvin & E.A. Roth, eds.) *African Pastoralist Systems. An Integrated Approach*. Chapter 10, pp. 185–204. Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder and London.

Galvin, K.A. 2009. Transitions: Pastoralists living with change. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 38: 187–194.

Getachew Kassa 2001. *Among the Pastoral Afar in Ethiopia: Tradition, Continuity and Socio-Economic Change*. International Books, Netherlands.

International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) 2004. *Food Security in Pastoral Areas of Ethiopia*. IIRR Africa Regional Center, Nairobi.

Nori, M., M. Taylor & A. Sensi 2008. Browsing on fences pastoral land rights, livelihoods and adaptation to climate change. *Drylands Issue Paper*, 148. Russell Press, Nottingham.

Pastoral Development Office (PDO) 2005. *Report Paper*. Hamer District Pastoral Development Office, Dimeka.

Strecker, I. 1976. *Traditional Life and Prospects for Socio-Economic Development in the Hamer Administrative District of Southern Gamu Gofa*. A Report to the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission of the Provisional Military Government of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.

Westphal, E. 1975. *Agricultural Systems in Ethiopia*. Center for Agricultural Publication and Documentation, Wageningen.

——— Accepted *May 10, 2012*

Author's Name and Address: Samuel Tefera, *Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto Unversity, 46, Shimoadachi-cho,Yoshida, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto 606-8501, JAPAN*.
E-mail: samuel [at] jambo.africa.kyoto-u.ac.jp

Appendix 1. Seasonal and farm calendar based on Hamer district

Names of months and characteristics
Hamer name/ English equivalent/ Amharic equivalent
Bere/ January/ *Tir*
Most of the Hamer, especially those in the lowlands, do not engage in farming during *Bere*. Instead they wait for next month's rains. Disputes are likely to occur over lack of water, crops, and milk; hence, mixing herds becomes difficult. This is a dry month, with less moisture to support growth. People who use rainfall for their livelihoods may move to temporary shelters on their farms.
Sor/ February/ *Yekatit*
Almost all people having farm plots begin sowing sorghum, maize, and seeds of other crops when the rain starts at the beginning of the month. *Sor* is a rainy month conducive for farming activities and re-growth of grasses.
Duka/ March/ *Megabit*
People farming near the river may suffer damages from sediment covering their fields from flooding. If possible, they will remove sediment or mud so that crops can continue to grow, or they will sow again. Like *Sor*, *Duka* is a rainy month.
Futa/ April/ *Miyaziya*
Futa refers to the flowering of agricultural crops; it is also a time for ripening. Rainfall during this month supports fruition.
Zako/ May/ *Ginbot*
During this month, crops ripen and people start to construct watchtowers (*Tule*) and shelters where they will temporarily reside to protect crops from birds and monkeys. Intense cold characterizes the month.
Hagai/ June/ *Sene*
This month marks the end of social festivals in the Hamer-Koke lowland areas and the beginning of festivities in the Lala and Gemer highland areas. According to the elders, variations in the timing of festivities that have similar processions and meanings to both highland and lowland Hamer groups emanate from variations in harvesting seasons due to agro-ecological differences.
Halet/ July/ *Hamle*
Harvest from farm fields is collected and stored. A threshing spot (*Koyidi*) is designated in a field to separate seeds from the husks. Threshed seed is mixed with ash to prevent insect damage. Crops are placed in piles (*dore*) outside the villages near bushes. During *Halet*, shedding of leaves is characteristic of certain crops and trees, such as *Gumez* and *Nojo*.
Shulal/ August/ *Nehase*
Piles of crops continue to be placed outside villages and near bushes. Rain is scarce, and trees, shrubs, and grasses start to suffer from moisture deficiency and stress.
Tajo/ September/ *Meskerem*
According to elders, rain may fall in *Tajo* if it is God's will. Otherwise, it is a month marking the advent of drought.
Tajo mingi/ October/ *Tikimt*
This month provokes superstitions. No one plans to hunt, wage war, or raid enemies. Many associate the term *mingi* with the Hamer's practice of abandoning children with unusual growths of milk teeth that are culturally regarded as bad omens for the respective families. However, the term has a wide range of meanings to include touching/milking cows or sheep (by married women and girls for whom marriages have already been arranged). Such activity may lead to removal of all generations of the particular cow or the sheep from the herd to prevent evil and destruction from coming upon the family and the community.

Names of months and characteristics
Hamer name/ English equivalent/ Amharic equivalent
Dalba/ November/ *Hidar*
Rainfall creates an environment conducive for clearing land and preparing fields for farming. Pools of water often accumulate in the goat/sheep and cattle kraals, indicating that livestock will not suffer from thirst as they can drink before they leave the villages for grazing and when they return at dusk to shelters.
Kilkila/ December/ *Tahsas*
Known as the driest month of the year, it is characterized by intense heat and lack of feed for the herds. People take advantage of the heat to burn the cleared, piled, and dried bush from the previous month's activities. Women will return from temporary locations to prepare the land for cultivation. During this month, able-bodied children remaining in villages will care for livestock in camp herds. Otherwise, camp herds become everyone's responsibility.